



**HEADQUARTERS  
ALABAMA WING, CIVIL AIR PATROL**  
United States Air Force Auxiliary  
810 Willow Street  
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112

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**Wing Crisis Communications Plan**

**Applicability:**

This plan applies to the Alabama Wing. It is the responsibility of the commanders, and staff to be familiar with this plan. This policy does not apply to Emergency Services Mission Operations.

**The purpose of this plan is to:**

- Ensure the flow of accurate and timely information to wing leadership, staff, the media and the public during a crisis.
- Provide the media with a reasonable level of access per CAP regulations and policy.
- Make it possible for Public Affairs Staff to develop unified messages in a crisis.
- Minimize unnecessary damage to the integrity and reputation of the unit & CAP.
- Counteract inaccurate criticism by providing accurate and honest information.

A crisis situation is defined as any situation deemed by unit staff as having a major impact on the wing, CAP as an organization and the public. Examples of a crisis situation may include incidents at CAP activities involving serious injury and or loss of life, terrorism, a member death, natural disasters, major crimes or major disruptions of operations. Crisis situations may include police investigations or other situations that require a public response. (Appendix A)

This plan is not intended to change the way emergencies are initially reported. All applicable CAP regulations will be followed in these initial and subsequent reports.

It is the goal of this crisis communications plan to establish guidelines for dealing with a variety of situations, and to ensure that leaders and communicators are familiar with these procedures and their roles in the event of a crisis. The plan is designed to be used in conjunction with the normal decision-making hierarchy of the wing and does not supplant that decision-making process.

Each crisis or emergency will require a unique public information response. The extent of the response will depend on the nature of the crisis.

### **Assumptions:**

Often the only information the public receives about an emergency is through the media; therefore, media relations is an essential component of any crisis plan. Timing is critical and a response must be issued as soon as possible with follow-up bulletins, as required.

With the advent of Internet technology, rumors can spread quickly via email, blogs and online forums. Therefore, it is critical that responses be issued as quickly as possible via various channels of online communication, both formal (such as the wing website and listservs) and informally.

A crisis situation could be big news and is likely to result in more public exposure for the wing than dozens of "good news" stories.

### **Crisis Communications Team:**

A Crisis Communications Team (CCT) is established that consists of the following members:

- Deputy Commanders
- Public Affairs Officer
- Legal Officer
- Those with experience in working a crisis
- Parents if cadets are involved and as needed
- Expert sources as needed

A roster of the unit's CCT can be found as Appendix B to this plan.

The CCT exists to advise the commander and craft the releases during a crisis. Commanders make the decision after advice from the CCT.

The commander will provide the Wing PAO an updated CCT List twice a year on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and 30<sup>th</sup> of June. An initial list must be provided upon approval of this plan.

**Crisis Center:** It is expected that crisis teams will work virtually through e-mail, phones and conference calls. If the need exists to set up a crisis center commanders are expected to use their best judgment as to location, size and scope of activities. The Wing Commander and the Wing PAO will be consulted prior to standing up a crisis center.

**Crisis Materials:** The PAO is assigned the task of maintaining materials to assist in the management of a crisis. As a minimum the PAO will maintain the following materials (may be electronic):

- This Plan
- Roster of the team

- Contact information for all area commanders and relevant wing staff members
- Media List (from most current online sources)
- CAP Fact sheets
- Positive statistics about CAP (most stats can be obtained from the Wing Intranet, CAPWatch or E-services)

**Spokesman:** The Commander and PAO are the spokespeople for the Wing and will be expected to work with local media. The Wing PAO is the spokesman for CAP in the state and will work with statewide/regional media. The Wing PAO is available to assist units and can serve as a local spokesman as needed.

**Electronic Resources:** The PAO will create messages which utilize the wing email list and the wing website as appropriate to communicate with CAP members and the public. These electronic communications will be approved by the commander before being disseminated.

### **Wing Crisis Communications Team:**

The Commander or designee should request the Wing Crisis Communications Team be assembled to assist. (Appendix B)

## **Phases of Response**

**Immediate:** The Commander and the PAO will determine if an official statement should be prepared and released. If warranted, they and the CCT will develop answers to specific questions that may be asked by the media and the media statement (release).

Commanders and their PAO's should not be afraid to work with local media in a crisis situation. Many times the local media covering the crisis will be the same media that will cover CAP in good times. CAP is not afraid to tell the truth. Tell it and move on. A better long term relationship can be built if CAP is candid in bad or rough times.

The PAO will brief staff and other area commanders who may have to answer questions from local media.

As part of this phase talking points should be developed. These are short simple messages that tell our story. They should be agreed to by the crisis team and delivered to all members authorized to speak to the media. Appendices C, D, E provide assistance in formulating responses.

The PAO will obtain basic information (type of crisis/emergency; time of emergency; actions taken; areas and number of people involved; injuries or fatalities; extent of damage) and prepare an official news release. All PA staff members will be kept informed of breaking news to enable them to answer media questions.

## **Key PAO Tasks**

- The PA staff will verify all sources of information.
- The PAO will clear news releases with the Commander and/or Incident Commander as quickly as possible before releasing to the media.
- The PAO will log and document all media inquiries on the standard ICS Mission log.

**Ongoing Period:** In an ongoing crisis, the PAO (with the help of the CCT) as appropriate will:

- Provide, via the news media and on the web, the public and constituents with basic information about an emergency or threatened emergency.
- Provide, via electronic mail or other means such as radio, the membership with basic information about the crisis. Insure that copies of all updates are concurrently sent to higher HQ.
- Keep the public, media and constituents informed of the situation and provide advice on what they should or should not do to prevent further damage or loss of life, panic or interference with emergency response efforts. Information will be provided via the wing website and via news releases to the area media.
- Log all media inquiries and responses using the ICS Mission Log Form.
- Instruct the public on how to obtain further advice or information.

**Recovery Period:** The PAO will issue media updates for as long as necessary, then scale back activities as warranted. Such updates will be posted online. Upon termination of the crisis situation, the PAO will schedule a meeting of all key players to review all actions taken and lessons learned. These will be included in an after-action report to be forwarded to the Commander and other appropriate leaders and/or departments and to the SER PAO.

**Updates:** This plan will be reviewed and updated every year in the month of January.

The Region PAO will be sent an updated plan electronically for the approval of the Region Commander or designee. It will also be available for download on the wing's intranet.

The CCT should be assembled periodically to discuss the plan and any updates. The Commander will convene these meetings. Results of the meetings and revisions of the plan are to be documented and filed with the plan. Copies of this plan should be addressed to all members listed in the plan and any other personnel who might play a role in the event of a crisis.

**Training:** Unit leaders and CCT members will be required to view the "Crisis Communication Presentation", during the month of January. After viewing the presentation the member will sign a register that indicates he/she has reviewed the presentation. This register will be filed with the plan and record of plan review/updates.

**APPROVED:**

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**DISTRIBUTION: 1 Each (Electronic)**

Wing Staff  
Squadron Commanders  
Squadron Public Affairs Officers  
Southeast Region Director of Public Affairs  
National Director of Public Affairs

**RECORD OF REVIEW:**

Review Date	Reviewer's Initials

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Possible Scenarios:

1. Cadets
  - 1.1. Vehicle accident
  - 1.2. Aircraft Accident
  - 1.3. Sexual Harrassment
  - 1.4. Training Accident
2. Senior Members
  - 2.1. Vehicle Accident
  - 2.2. Aircraft Accident
  - 2.3. Sexual Harassment
  - 2.4. Training Accident
3. SAR/DR
  - 3.1. Missing Aircraft
  - 3.2. Flood
  - 3.3. Tornado
4. Events of National Significance
  - 4.1. Hurricane
  - 4.2. Terrorist Attack
  - 4.3. WMD
  - 4.4. Earthquake
  - 4.5. Pandemic

**Appendix B: Crisis Communication Team**

<b>Who</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Phone numbers</b>	<b>Email</b>
Vice Commander	Lt. Col. David Boswell		n4apy@hotmail.com
Public Affairs Officer	Maj. Patricia Mitcham		pmitcham@knology.net
Chief of Staff	Maj. Lisa Robinson		cs@alwg.cap.gov
Emergency Services	Maj. John Neil		jneil@uis-usa.com
Safety Officer	Lt. Col Harold Coghlan		hcoglan@magicexpressair.com
Legal Officer	Capt. John Davis		legal@alwg.us

**Appendix C: Talking Points (Have five command messages ready to go)**

1. We know that \_\_\_\_\_ has happened and we are investigating it.
2. Safety of our volunteers and our community is paramount.
3. Addition information will be released as soon as it is verified as accurate.
4. A press conference will be held at \_\_\_\_\_(time)\_\_\_\_\_.
5. Our investigation of this incident is ongoing and we are in frequent communication with (Wing/Region/National) Civil Air Patrol.



#### **Appendix D: Interview Bridging Techniques (to return the focus to CAP talking points)**

- “The key issue is . . . .”
- “It’s important to note that . . . .”
- “However. . . .”
- “Let me reiterate that. . . .”
- “That’s the main reason that we’re . . . .”
- “What we’re focused on is. . . .”
- “Our record demonstrates that. . . .”
- “Let me emphasize. . . .”
- “What’s important is that. . . .”
- “It’s imperative that we remember. . . .”

Source of Bridging Techniques: PAO Academy, 2007. Handout from Dr. Joe Trahan, APR, Fellow, PRSA. Reprinted with permission

**Appendix E: Possible questions:** Develop basic answers for these questions.

**Quick Guide to Basic Interview Preparation**

<b>News Value Factors</b>	<b>Likely Questions</b>	<b>Possible Positive Points</b>
Impact	How many people or groups affected? What's the impact/effect on other operations? What's the cost	Steps taken to minimize impact
Timeliness	When did it happen? When did you find out? When did you do something about it?	Quick response Good training
Prominence	Anyone prominent involved? Anyone prominent injured? Prominent suspect/victims? What's his/her role?	We treat everyone equally.
Proximity	Where did it happen? Where are the victims/survivors from? Any local sources/local involvement?	Concern for various local "Publics" Varies by location
Oddity	Has this ever happened before? What are the odds of such an incident/accident/occurrence?	Talk about lessons learned How current plans minimize impact
Suspense	What will happen next? Anyone in trouble/facing disciplinary action? When will you know the cause?	Talk about actions you are taking
Conflict	How do you answer the charges made by _____? Do you think this is really fair to _____?	Explain why you are doing what you are doing
Emotion/Victims	Any women, children, or elderly involved?	Say what you are doing to help
Sex	Were there any women involved> What is the nature of their relationship?	Protect individual privacy Treat men and women equally
Current trends	Any connections between this issue and any other recent news stories about _____?	Explain differences or similarities between this and other such incidents.

Source for Quick Guide PAO Academy, 2007: Handout from Dr. Joseph V. Trahan III, APR, Fellow, PRSA  
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**Appendix F: Persons to Contact As Required**

Position	Who	phone #	email
SER Commander	Col. Jim Rushing		jrushing@cap.gov
National PA	Julie Debardeladen		jDbebardelaben@nhq.gov
SER Legal Officer	Lt. Col. Barry Herrin		BHerrin@sercap.us
SER PA	Capt Steven Solomon		sercappao@gmail.com
SER Safety Officer	Maj. Bill Woody		bwoody@sercap.us